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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 SARAJEVO 001520

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SUBJECT: BOSNIA - DODIK'S OPTIONS FOR BOSNIA: IT'S MY WAY
OR THE HIGHWAY

REF: A. SARAJEVO 1519

[1](#)B. SARAJEVO 1507

[1](#)C. SARAJEVO 1459

Classified By: Ambassador English. Reason 1.4(b) and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: As we have reported, Republika Srpska (RS) PM Milorad Dodik has taken a number of actions over the last 12 months to undermine the Bosnian state, his most being his attacks on TRANSCO (Ref C) and in challenging the authorities of state-level law enforcement and judicial authorities (Ref A). In addition, in a series of media statements, interviews, and op-ed pieces over the same period PM Dodik has been laying out and expanding on his vision for an acceptable future for Bosnia and Herzegovina -- and the RS's place in it. His vision has generally been presented piecemeal and in response to the issues of the moment, such as Kosovo independence, the controversy over his remarks at a Serb gathering in Zagreb, or Karadzic's arrest. However, over the last several months, Dodik has increasingly framed the issue of Bosnia's future as a choice between two alternative paths: a) Bosnia's integration into Europe -- provided certain RS conditions are met; or, b) dissolution of the country. Though he has publicly claimed not to want the latter, the conditions he has attached to his support for the former have steadily expanded (e.g., from abolishment of the Bonn Powers, to OHR's closure, to police reform on RS terms, to "recognition" of the RS by Federation-based politicians). In a September 18 interview with Radio Free Europe (RFE) Dodik expounded at length on Bosnia's present and future, tying together a series of themes he has raised before and introducing new ones. Most significantly, Dodik attached another condition to his willingness to pursue a European future within Bosnia: the return of competencies previously transferred to the state. He has also more starkly defined the alternative if his conditions are not met: partition. He claimed to prefer resolving Bosnia's problems (albeit on his terms), but he concluded that partition might be only "rational" outcome, stating clearly that he was "not against such an option." The Party for Democratic Action (SDA) declaration adopted on September 20 and subsequent warnings by SDA President Tihic about a possible future conflict in Bosnia overshadowed Dodik's interview (Ref B). We do not believe Dodik's interview was mere election-year rhetoric; it provided clear insight into his strategy, the strategy to which SDA's declaration was a response. END SUMMARY

Republika Srpska Is Everything

12. (C) A September 18 Radio Free Europe (RFE) interview with RS PM Milorad offers interesting insights into his thinking about Bosnia's problems and his vision for its future. To begin with, Dodik implies that his outlook and that of his party has evolved over the years. "We (my party and I) have realized that Republika Srpska is the essence of everything people want, and something they value most." Dodik explains that this judgment has driven his rhetoric and actions since returning to power in 2006 and will continue to do so. "Precisely the RS, its unquestionableness, viability, development, in peace of course. People respond more to attacks on Republika Srpska, than, for example, to the issue of whether a road has been constructed or not...Therefore, we need to respond to the issue of importance to the people." Dodik returns to this theme at the close of his interview but uses nationalist language to make his point. "I will tell you that I do not think about Bosnia emotionally. I do not love it. I think about the RS very emotionally." With these comments Dodik paints himself and his party as reflecting the will of their Serb constituents, as any committed democrat would, it is implied. Dodik doesn't quite portray himself as a prisoner of 'the will of the people' as he has in the past, but he continues to ignore his responsibility to constructively shape the debate in Bosnia or lead his constituents away from the traditionally destructive political approach of the RS.

Bosnia Is Not Working

13. (SBU) Dodik paints a bleak picture of the current

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situation in Bosnia. He notes that "BiH is a deeply segregated society and divided country and over the years it has not managed to find internal reasons for additional integration." Instead, he says, Bosnia has "only further disintegrated." Dodik underscores that the international community has "not managed to create a framework within which BiH could function" despite its activism and the imposition of "800 laws," adding that Bosnia as a country is "very hard to sustain." Dodik also opines that thirteen years after Dayton "the basic relation between people in BiH, between different ethnic groups and citizens in general today is absolutely on a lower level of communication than it was in the past." In another passage, Dodik strives to present his assessment of Bosnia in terms that imply he has reached these conclusions more in sorrow than in anger. "I used to have faith that Bosnia could build itself and become functional. I do not have that faith any longer. I do not see any potential for it."

There Are Two Roads Forward

14. (C) After diagnosing Bosnia's problems, Dodik lays out what he implies are the only two possible cures for them. The first is "to establish the functionality of joint institutions." The second is "(the two entities) peacefully part" (i.e., a Czechoslovakia-type velvet divorce resulting in the entities becoming two independent countries). As he has in the past, Dodik insists that he prefers the first option, building a functional Bosnia, but he then defines "functional" in a manner that makes its almost impossible to achieve. Dodik repeats his earlier demand that the "Dayton framework" must be maintained, reiterating that he will not enter into discussions about resolving Bosnia's problems unless "the RS is recognized as an unquestionable category" (i.e., no abolition of the RS). In the past, he has also made clear that the RS would not allow or tolerate the transfer of any additional competencies from the entities to the state. In his RFE interview Dodik goes further. He demands that Bosnia "further decentralize functions whose transfer to BiH joint institutions (i.e., the state) was imposed by OHR." In other words, Dodik defines a functional Bosnia as one in which many of the most critical reforms of

the last 13 years are reversed. Later in the interview, he explains that many of these reforms have failed, but not unsurprisingly, he ignores the RS role, including the role of his government, in ensuring that many state institutions are inefficient or ineffective.

Constitutional Reform Talks Are The Final Test

15. (C) Dodik predicts that the question of whether it is possible to build a "functional" Bosnia -- and avoid partition -- will likely be settled during constitutional reform negotiations. "This (i.e., constitutional reform) is an issue on which BiH will show whether it has a chance to exist." Dodik anticipates that these talks will collapse, however; in part, he suggests, because the Bosniaks are, in the end, unreasonable and unwilling to accept the RS. As he has in the past, Dodik criticizes Bosniak member of the Tri-Presidency Haris Silajdzic for driving the Bosniak agenda, but he goes much further in the RFE interview, claiming that there are no reasonable Bosniak interlocutors with whom he and the Serbs can work. Instead of the general criticism of "Sarajevo politicians" Dodik has used in the past, this time Dodik singles out the leaders of the Party of Democratic Action (SDA), Sulejman Tihic, and the Social Democratic Party (SDP, Zlatko Lagumdžija, by name. "Thanks to Haris Silajdzic, the RS has awakened and realized that all the caricaturing by Lagumdžija and Tihic, in essence boils down to the same policy that Haris Silajdzic implements. Their mental and other prefixes are different but their goals are the same (i.e., the abolition of the RS)." So while Dodik says he is willing to "sit with Bosniaks and Croats, and agree on a functional model that will be satisfactory to everybody," he defines his Bosniak counterparts in such a way as to make it virtually impossible for him to reach agreement with them and their objectives in manner that assigns them blame for what he sees as Bosnia's inevitable collapse.

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Partition Would Not Be A Tragedy

16. (C) Dodik states clearly that he is "not against" partition, if it comes to that, and he is also sanguine about the possibility Bosnia could collapse. "And, it will not be tragic if (Bosnia) shows that it does not stand a chance. It would be tragic if disagreements of the kind yield violence. However, I believe reasonable men can discuss everything and conclude that something cannot function to peacefully agree on the way ahead." The implication of this statement and other observations in the interview is that Dodik is one of those "reasonable men" to whom he refers, and that violence, if it comes, will originate from the Federation, not the RS. Dodik has spoken of "alternative paths for the RS" in the past, implying that the RS could or would secede under certain circumstances, but we believe that his RFE comments are among the clearest and strongest references to Bosnia's dissolution Dodik has made over the last year. In several instances, Dodik attempts to portray this stark message as nothing more than his attempt to honestly and openly confront issues that others chose to ignore. "Whatever I say, and I strive to be realistic, can be misinterpreted. I believe this country is hardly sustainable."

The RS Can Make It On Its Own, If It Has To

17. (C) Dodik is careful, as he usually is, to say that he is "aware of the fact that we (i.e., the RS) cannot be a separate body," but this single line is undercut by several comments about the RS's capacity to function independently. In fact, Dodik's pessimism about Bosnia's future is matched by an almost unbridled optimism about the RS's potential. "All the analyses indicate that the RS functions flawlessly in a political, administrative, territorial, and economic

sense, that it has proven to be completely self-sustainable," Dodik asserts. At another point in the interview Dodik stresses that he "believes that the (RS) can function, and the RS has proven it." Dodik also challenges the notion that additional reforms that come at the expense of the RS are the best way to secure Bosnia's European future. He argues that past experience has established that such reforms will not work and/or they are not genuine requirements, but he implies, simply designed to punish the RS. Here Dodik uses former HighRep Ashdown to make his point. "Ashdown had imposed a catalogue of laws, and achieved nothing. He has only further divided BiH...regardless of what his intent was." Dodik then accuses Ashdown of "using and lying (sic) European institutions, as in the case of police reform," and then stresses that "we have learned our lesson."

Yugoslavia And The Lessons Of History

18. (C) In a commentary that RS papers published earlier this year, Dodik asserted that Bosniaks demanded independence from Yugoslavia at the start of the nineties, and fought the 1992-1995 war to achieve their objective. He claimed that Bosnian Serbs opposed the break-up of the multi-ethnic Yugoslav state; he also suggested that Bosniak demands to abolish the RS were reminiscent of the policies pursued by Slobodan Milosevic prior to Yugoslavia's break-up. In his RFE interview, Dodik elaborates on this theme, blaming the EU for allowing "Yugoslavia to divide along the lines of ethnic homogenization." Dodik then complains that "contrary to all these ethnic homogenization processes, however, important foreigners decided that Bosnia alone has to prove that it can move forward as a society of deep ethnic divisions." The result, 18 years later, Dodik argues is that "Bosnia is showing that she is incapable of doing it." The implication of Dodik's "analysis" is clear: if the international community accepted that Yugoslavia could not function as a multi-ethnic state, then why does it expect Bosnia to do so?

I Respect Dayton, But I Am Not Bluffing

19. (C) Throughout the RFE interview Dodik stresses his respect for Dayton. "We in the RS do not dispute a single authority BiH has in accordance with the Constitution...I,

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naturally, believe in laws and respect the Constitution and the Dayton Agreement." However, he makes crystal clear that he and the RS are not prepared to go beyond Dayton. "We are not ready to be creative for things that are outside the Dayton framework, outside our wishes." Dodik also states matter of factly that the RS will not succumb to pressure. "We are now aware that there is no way for the international community to exert pressure here as it did in the past," he says. He emphasizes this point with regard to constitutional reform: "no international leadership, no political pressure from the outside." To underscore his seriousness about his bottom line (i.e., Dayton as drafted), Dodik repeats a threat he first made during the crisis over the October (2007) measures. "We are faced with a clear choice" and "if forced, we have a democratic right not to work in (BiH) institutions." Elaborating, he explains that "our people will not withdraw from the parliament or the Council of Ministers," but "will withdraw from the positions of chairs of joint bodies," which will, as a result, "lose their legitimacy." In other words, Dodik will make Bosnia ungovernable.

Comment: More Than Just Words

110. (C) Dodik's RFE interview lays out a clear vision for Bosnia. Though Dodik is careful to claim that he favors a European future for the RS insider Bosnia -- a fact he would undoubtedly point to if challenged -- he deliberately

attaches conditions to this path designed to makes the logic of his alternative -- peaceful partition -- appear inevitable because others will force this option upon him. Much of what Dodik said to RFE is not new. In fact, it is a sad comment on the state of Bosnia's political affairs that a year ago it was almost unthinkable for an RS Prime Minister to openly refer to the dissolution of the country as even a remote possibility. Dodik is now presenting it as the only "rational" solution to Bosnia's problems. Nonetheless, Dodik did use the RFE interview to up the rhetorical ante. First, by requiring the return of competencies previously transferred to the state as a condition for establishing and working with a "functional Bosnia." Second, his presentation of partition goes beyond earlier speculation about Bosnia's dissolution. Like the September 20 SDA declaration, which overshadowed Dodik's interview, we do not believe that the RFE interview were simply pre-election rhetoric. To begin with, RFE is not the right vehicle to deliver a message to RS voters. In addition, Dodik's arguments are carefully constructed and build on statements and op-eds that go back for months.

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